

Assessing Rigor in Social Work Education from the Perspective of Students and Instructors

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Introduction

Rigor is an important part of any educational experience but students and instructors may have different perceptions of the actual components of rigor.

Academic rigor has been defined in the literature as an active learning process in which the opportunity and support necessary for intellectual growth is provided and individual students take responsibility for the effort they invest in learning.

This study aims to examine how undergraduate social work students and instructors perceive rigor and how those perceptions compare to one another.

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Question #1

How do undergraduate social work (BSSW) instructors and students perceive rigor?

Methods: A survey was developed based on the given definition of rigor. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the results and three distinct constructs were identified.

Course Relevance

- Relevance of course content and tasks to social work practice
- Cronbach's Alpha=0.95

Individual Effort

- Effort exerted by individual students while engaged in the course
- Cronbach's Alpha=0.70

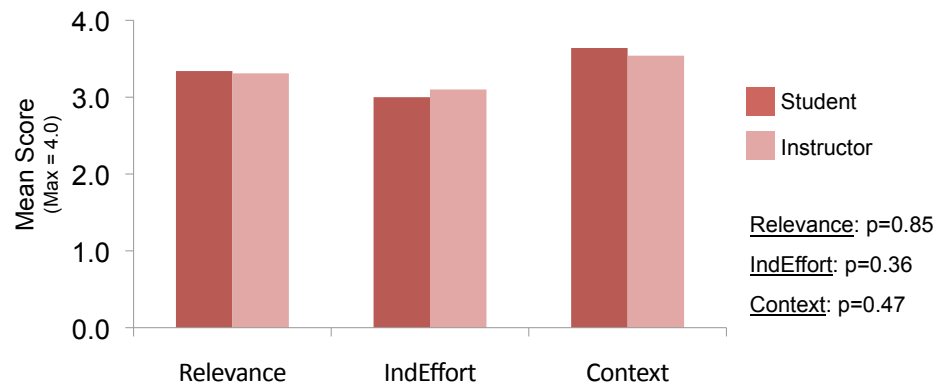
Course Context

- Perceived atmosphere while in classroom and while completing course tasks
- Cronbach's Alpha=0.89

Question #2

Do BSSW instructors and students have different perceptions of the rigor present in core courses?

Methods: Independent sample t-tests were performed to compare the group mean scores for each construct against one another. None of the p-values returned were significant. As seen below, the mean scores for each group were incredibly similar.



Discussion

The three constructs identified by the exploratory factor analysis had strong reliability scores, showing that the constructs have a high internal consistency and reliably measure the underlying constructs reported. Therefore, this measure could be used to survey a larger or interdisciplinary sample to further understand rigor in the University setting.

The results from Question #2 show that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of students and instructors on any construct. However, based on the mean scores, it is clear that both groups have a more positive perception of course context and relevance than they do of individual student effort. It would be interesting to see if this same pattern emerges across disciplines.

References

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